

# The Interpretation of Contemporary "New Mainstream" Cinema —The Battle at Lake Changjin and My People, My Country As Examples

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**Abstract.** The new mainstream film is an upgraded version of the main theme film, which is more commercial, entertaining and popular. The themes are more extensive, and the casting is bolder and more grounded. Nowadays, the rise of new mainstream films also means that Chinese films have embarked on a new journey. A new type of film that combines artistry and commercialism skillfully has its unique advantages from both artistic and commercial perspectives.

## 1 Introduction

As an important vehicle for carrying China's dreams and building cultural confidence, cinema has always conveyed mainstream ideology and conceptual values with its rich and vivid content and forms. Since the 21st century, as the overall industrialisation of Chinese cinema has become more mature and the marketisation process has gradually advanced, melodramatic cinema has begun its own transformation and innovation. As melodramatic films have begun to pay real attention to the sense of cinema, experimenting with genre expression, balancing ideology, artistry and spectacle in narrative and characterisation, they have become the new mainstream commercial films, gaining high reputation and box office, and the industry has formed a consensus that "melodramatic" is moving towards "new mainstream". The industry has formed a consensus that the "main theme" is moving towards the "new mainstream".

## 2 The present theory

### 2.1 Definition and explanation of "new mainstream" films

When it comes to "new mainstream" films, we have to mention "theme" films and "mainstream" films. These three types of films all play an important role in carrying the Chinese dream and establishing their own cultural confidence. They always convey the mainstream ideology and ideological values in vivid content and form. But they are also very different from each other. This type of film is constantly developing and progressing. "Main melody" is originally a term from the music field, which refers to the main tune of a voice part in music performance. In 1987, at the National Feature Film Creation Conference, the Film Bureau put forward the

word "theme" for the first time, and encouraged filmmakers to create "theme" films with the idea of "sticking to the theme and sticking to the diversity". During that period, the birth of a large number of films with revolutionary historical themes also laid the keynote of Chinese theme films. In 1988, the film *Founding Ceremony*, which recorded the founding moment, was born and became the landmark work of the theme film. In the 1990s, with the rapid development of social economy and popular culture, the disadvantages of theme films began to appear. First, political expression was greater than artistic expression, and the theme was turned into a textbook of sound and painting; Secondly, too much emphasis is placed on creating the perfect hero image and the completely negative villain image. The characterization of the character image is single and unrealistic. As a result, the industry began to propose "mainstream film", which, on the one hand, continued the valuable character of the traditional theme film in advocating the mainstream cultural route, on the other hand, actively adapted to the new era of market economic conditions and the development mode of film industrialization reform. The commercialization of traditional theme films, that is, the commercialization of theme films, has become a good strategy for the film and television industry to deal with the drawbacks of theme films. After entering the 21st century, with the overall level of the Chinese film industry rising and the growing maturity of marketization, "mainstream" films have begun their own innovation and transformation, breakthrough and innovation. The narrative mode of the "new mainstream" film has gradually changed in recent years. Instead of outputting various grand political ideas in a condescending manner, it has made the audience resonate in the historical moment reappearance of the national memory through the shaping of civilian heroes in the background of the great era, and realized the collective memory of building social identity. In recent years, a large number of new mainstream films have

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emerged, all reaping excellent results at the box office and in terms of word-of-mouth. 2019 sees the 70th anniversary of the founding of the country. In 2020, the 70th anniversary of the US-aided war against Korea will be celebrated. In 2021, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. 1921" and "The Revolutionary" are the double feature films to celebrate the centenary of the Communist Party. The "new mainstream" films are different from the "melodramatic" films in their balance between politics, commercialism, artistry and entertainment. The "new mainstream" films cater more to the aesthetic and viewing tendencies of contemporary audiences.

The new mainstream film is assuming the new mission of Chinese cultural construction. The new mainstream film can not only promote the spread of mainstream values, play an educational role for people, but also build up the cultural self-confidence of Chinese people. If China wants to move from a cultural power to a cultural power, it is essential for the people to maintain a high level of cultural self-confidence. The mainstream values in the new mainstream films fully emphasize respect for individuals and reverence for life, with more profound philosophical connotation and humanistic care. At the same time, they closely combine the fate of the characters with the fate of the country, and strengthen the sense of community. In essence, the "new mainstream cinema" is a creative mode in which melodramatic cinema gradually evolves towards commercialization, and is the inevitable result of the political, economic and cultural integration of countries under the trend of globalization. The Chinese story is open and comprehensive; it is both historical, current and future, as well as national, ethnic and personal.

## 2.2 Literature review

The emergence of "new mainstream" films is based on "theme" films, but it is also very different from them. The absolute justice, absolute redness and exaggerated propaganda of the "theme" films even made the audience have a certain aversion to this kind of films. The "new mainstream" films are more like retaining the characteristics and advantages of the "theme" films, but changing their disadvantages. The popularity of "new mainstream" films also makes people start to re-examine such a film type. It also makes people start to think about the reasons for the success of "new mainstream" films.

The Battle at Lake Changjin → 5,760 million

Wolf Warriors II → 5.681 billion

Chinese Doctors → \$3.221 billion

My people, My country → 3.102 billion

The Captain → \$2.866 billion

A comparison of the figures shows that the "new mainstream" films have become the main contributors to the box office, and "The Battle at Lake Changjin" has overtaken "Wolf Warriors II" to become the number one film at the domestic box office. The commercial nature of this genre has made directors and actors very willing to make films in this genre.

The new mainstream film transcends the traditional theme film and ordinary commercial film, and combines the advantages of the two types of films to form its own new type. It will not make the audience's receptivity poor and the box office bleak because of its complete commercial film nature, which is only for the sake of box office and does not take into account other factors, nor because it is just thinking about artistic creation like literary films. The new mainstream film will perfectly integrate the communication of contemporary mainstream values and the expression methods loved by the audience, and coordinate and unify. The final audience of the film is ordinary people, so the creation should start from the aesthetic perspective and preferences of the audience, which is achieved by the new mainstream film. The new mainstream film takes a variety of themes as the carrier, which not only conveys the mainstream values to the audience, but also satisfies the aesthetic taste of most audiences. For example, "The Battle at Lake Changjin" is a fusion of war movies and theme movies; "The Bravest" is a fusion of disaster film heroes and theme films; "Leap" is the integration of sports theme and theme film; "The Climbers" is the fusion of adventurism theme and theme film; "The Wandering Earth" is more integrated with the elements of science fiction film, which satisfies people's curiosity and also greatly satisfies the audience's aesthetic pleasure. In this film, the fantastic storyline, exquisite CG special effects and clever camera language make this film popular with the audience while spreading the values of the new era.

In many 'new mainstream' films, a lot of stars are used to attract a younger audience, such as Yangqianxi Yi, Hao Ou and Dongjun Han in "The Battle at Lake Changjin", and Haoran Liu, Feiyu Chen and Yilong Zhu in "My people, My country". As audiences continue to get younger, the "new mainstream" films are beginning to favour the practice of piling up stars, often with dozens of famous actors and actresses in a single film, with all the familiar faces in the film. In fact, it is an honour for the stars to be cast in such films, a choice that enhances their self-worth, so many of the 'new mainstream' films now have stars rushing to star in them.

## 2.3 The choice of subject matter and the core of storytelling in "new mainstream" cinema

The "new mainstream" films have expanded greatly in their choice of story themes. Compared to the previous "melodramatic films", which were about the war against Japan and the Founding of the People's Republic, the themes of the "new mainstream" films are much broader and closer to people's lives nowadays. The subject matter of films is no longer limited to war, but starts from current events and stories of small people: floods, earthquakes, sports, disaster relief ..... For example, "The Captain" is a very good "new mainstream" film disaster film. It is based on a real event experienced by people in the present day, a sensational news story brought to the screen, allowing the audience to understand more about the details of what happened, satisfying the curiosity of many people and praising the crew. When the film ends

with a photo of the actors and the real people they portrayed, it also gives the viewer a more realistic feeling of having experienced it for themselves. This is a genre that resonates more with audiences than the war films that are so far removed from the present day.[2]

## 2022 Worldwide Box Office

| Rank ^ | Release Group     | Worldwide ↕   |
|--------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1      | Water Gate Bridge | \$480,028,494 |
| 2      | Too Cool to Kill  | \$217,000,000 |
| 3      | Scream            | \$130,255,539 |
| 4      | Jackass Forever   | \$51,820,256  |

Figure 1 Changjinho box office data, self-by-myself

## 2.4 The artistry of characterisation in "new mainstream" films

The characterization of the "new mainstream" films is very deep and specific.

### 2.4.1 Characterization of 'My people, My country'

The film has a knack and a fondness for portraying small characters in its cinema. This is almost a common feature in the characterization of new mainstream films in recent years. The characters in the films can easily find common ground with young people; the leaders are not superior or perfect, but have similar emotions to ordinary people, which makes these historical figures more imaginative, vivid and three-dimensional; for the grassroots party cadres and heroes of various industries, they are no longer flat and perfect images. Behind the scenes, there are times when they are confused, perplexed and even timid and retreat. This allows the film to resonate with all audiences, including young viewers, and to inspire them with ideas and beliefs. For example, instead of focusing on big characters, *The Night Before* and *Encounter in 'My people, My country'* depict the life experiences of small people. Zhiyuan Lin (played by Bo Huang), the head of flagpole construction design in *The Night Before*, has a historical prototype that gives him the natural advantage of being more easily moved and more realistic in his creation. Filming the stories of minor characters, on the other hand, will have more details than others, and it is often these small details that will move the audience the most and hit them straight in the heart. For example, Ou Ho's character sits on the roof of a house and uses a loud speaker to shout to the people to collect rare metals, although a large number of people take out the only metal objects they have at home, one by one, although most of them are not used, but in this atmosphere of unity and newness, the audience can easily substitute into the characters, and such scenes can bring tears to the eyes. His fearlessness in the face of the bigger picture is touching. Tianchen Wang, who plays the trumpet player

in the film, is a marginal character in a film about a minor character, but he also plays a huge role in the plot. Although he cannot be the one to play the trumpet under the podium, his ability to play the trumpet without missing a beat helps the protagonists to complete their tasks. This is how the "new mainstream" films portray the small people with precision.

### 2.4.2 Seventeenth Interspersed Company Characterization

In any country or in any era, the shaping of a heroic image is inevitable. Similarly, shaping the image of China's heroes is a necessary task in the process of China's development, especially in military-themed film and television works, where heroes embody more the spirit of commitment in the face of danger, the spirit of fearless sacrifice, the patriotic sentiment of loyalty and the indomitable quality of perseverance. This is the inevitable way to promote the spirit of patriotism and heroism. Similarly, as a 'new mainstream' film, there is no shortage of national events such as war and the fight against epidemics as subject matter. This part of the film differs from previous films that focus on the small man, as they usually portray a group of heroes, and they celebrate the group hero. The film is based on the historical battle of Jangjin Lake against the United States and Korea, and is an artistic creation that draws on history to write the memory of the battle against the United States and Korea for a national audience; the portrayal of the characters in 'The Battle at Lake Changjin' is very comprehensive and perfect. Each hero unites to make the film's heroic Seventeenth Interspersed Company. In this film, the typical, group, small, big, growing up, mature and so on are interwoven in a ceiling-level manner, and the meticulous characterization contributes to the plot, the emotion and the artistic expression, creating a heroic image of Chinese soldiers in the war against the US and Korea that will move every viewer. What distinguishes the "new mainstream" films from the "red films" of the past is, in my opinion, the three-dimensional characterization. The characters in the film are no longer perfect, they have their weaknesses and weaknesses, and they need to grow up. The character of Wanli Wu, played by Yangqianxi Yi, "went to the ice field in single clothes, fierce battle to write the spring and autumn, retreated beyond the enemy's gate, vowed to defend the majestic mountains and rivers", Wanli Wu illustrates the growth process of a growing hero. As an ignorant teenager, with an obsession for military glory, the moment Wanli Wu got on the train meant the beginning of growth. Carrying a steel gun and running to the front, every step forward is for the sake of the country and every sprint is for the sake of faith. The portrayal of his Wanli Wu in the film "The Battle at Lake Changjin" can be described as very three-dimensional and in line with reality. From being punished for disobedience and writing an examination, he becomes a brave and resourceful pitcher, which is an improvement of his heroic skills; from grief, fear and cowardice at the sacrifice of his partner Xiaoshan to the fearlessness of

volunteering to die at any time, which is a heroic belief; from curiosity about guns and the belief that if you destroy 20 enemies, you will become a hero. From a curiosity about guns and the belief that if you destroy 20 enemies you will become a hero, you will become a humanitarian warrior who says "some robberies can be avoided". A series of vivid character portrayals are accompanied by changes in perceptions, the first time he rushes into battle, the first time he shoots to kill, the first time he throws a grenade ....., and Wu Wanli finally becomes the 677th soldier to qualify for the 7th Company. Through the film, it is as if the audience has experienced this growth with Wanli Wu.

### 3 Conclusion

For a long time, there has been no standard answer to the judgment of a good film, but one thing can be sure that when a film conforms to the mainstream values of the times and can arouse the collective resonance of the audience, it must be a good film in this era. In recent years, the "new mainstream" films have become an indispensable scene on the screen due to their frequent blockbusters. In the constant practice and self renewal, the new mainstream film has solved the insurmountable gap between the traditional theme film and the commercial film. It can be said that the new mainstream film has the family and country feelings of the theme film and the high box office of the commercial film at the same time. The perfect integration of artistry and commerciality is fully reflected in the new mainstream film, and forms a diversified balance between the transmission of values, commercial requirements and artistic aesthetics. On the one hand, the new mainstream films are more consistent with the aesthetics of contemporary audiences in terms of characterization and plot creation. They are no longer a single graphic character image. Everyone has his strengths and weaknesses. The characters are more distinctive, the plot is more realistic and vivid, and more contemporary; On the other hand, the new mainstream film has realized the integration of commerce and art by expanding the choice of themes. It can be said that today's "new mainstream" films have long since moved away from the stereotypical political preaching label and have not only been well received by audiences, but have also demonstrated their own strong commercial potential.

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